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THE ART OF THE LATIN COUNTRIES

When at the beginning of a new century representative paintings from the most representative countries of "Latin" Europe and America, were collected under a single roof, as they were in the west pavilion of the Fine Art Galleries of the World's Fair, no one who spent the time on them necessary to make even a remote approach to their collective meaning could come away with the idea that "Latinism" in its modern sense stands for decadence.

It is unmistakably apparent, as I have said elsewhere in the press, that these countries are expressing through painting a forward impulse of unrest, whose first result is a great diversity of subject, with a tendency at times to seek novelty, both of subject and of method, for its own sake, in the mere spirit of a revolt. It is clear that in every country represented at the Fair the Latin impulse is breaking from the traditions of its past, but whatever may be the impression from the paintings shown on the walls of any given room in the pavilion, it was even clearer from the whole that the same impulse is working into a higher future, a future of broader scope, larger liberty of idea, and freer methods, won not through mere revolt, but through clearer vision and advance step by step where the light leads.

The strongest peculiarity of the Latin mind in Italy, in painting, sculpture, and poetry, has been the attempt to express all living nature through human nature, to personify. The "Druid oak," which, in the North, stood for the hidden and always enduring vitality of nature, suggested to the Latin mind a divinely human form, perfect in its beauty, feminine in its grace, and vital because of a life in it closely akin to the human, though still superhuman.

Poetry and painting in all countries begin in a similar attempt to translate all living nature into forms of human nature, but the genius of Italy has far exceeded that of any other country in the use of the human form as the chief vehicle of the expression for all other ideas of nature painting is capable of expressing at all. What this means in the professedly classical or mythological art of the galleries is suggested in Bouguereau's "Las Oreades," which was shown in the French division, and in an Italian painting by F. Cipolla, in which, though the name is different, the idea is the same, the method of interpreting nature identical, and the appeal to the mind of the spectator similar.

Although the mastery of flesh tint and of form as flesh tint expresses it has been carried to its highest in Paris, although it has been carried higher in Paris by no one than by Bouguereau, it may be said that in these two similar paintings, the Italian is certainly



WINTER
By Ernest Lawson

not the inferior of the French in method. The one picture and the other says all that could be thus said in form and color within its own scope. The Italian painting symbolizes what is most vital in the life of nature by female forms rising from the earth and

multiplying indefinitely in perspective, to blend at last into the mists which rise at evening. The primitive mind personified such mists as "will of the wisps" and as nature spirits of good or evil in human form. The Italian treatment is not incompatible with a sincere attempt to use this primitive personification to express the artist's own ideas of the life which surrounds the human and flows into it at all points.

In the French picture, however, the artist, using his great skill to the utmost, uses it to show his superiority of intellect, not only to the mode he has of expressing it, but also to those to whom he judges this expression is most likely to appeal. His "Oreades" or native spirits, rise from the earth in a perspective of flesh tints which extends into undefined space. In the foreground, as proxies and vicegerents for spectators actually outside the frame, the artist paints two satyrs, who in the symbolism he is using, stand for what is lowest and most nearly brutal in the operations of the human mind itself, as its development is just beginning. The faun, the satyr, the human, as it shows the "cloven hoof" which Christian symbolism borrowed from the faun for its devil, has the sense of beauty only as a passing sensual impression. And the artist flouts the spectator who admires beauty of "technique" by adding in expression of his own superiority to the admiration he excites, the Latin hexameters:

Ut radians critur tenebris. Aurora fugatis
 Et roseo summos illustrat lumina montis,
 Nympharum lasciva, cohors quae nocte sub umbra
 Sylvarum ad placidi ludebat fluminis oras
 Ad natale fugax longo volat agmine caelum
 Divinosque petit, faunis mirantibus, arces.

As those lines explain themselves and the picture, all that is most beautiful in the picture itself is reduced to the standard of the admiring "fauns" or satyrs of the foreground. The vital spirits of nature become "lasciva cohors," expressing on the canvas of Bouguereau an idea Goethe expressed in the carnival of his witches on Walpurgis night. The connection is not wholly an accident in painting, for the first expression of this idea by the method Bouguereau here uses was used in a painting known as "The Dream of Faust," in which the same idea and a similar method of expressing it are clearly apparent. Sincerity, it has been said, is the first essential of all great art, and the great artist, when he is sincere, cannot use his art to show his superiority to those to whom he appeals, much less to flout them through it.

The fact that an artist of Bouguereau's great skill uses his art to express, almost without disguise, his scorn of those who demand from him the uses to which he puts it, illustrates an impulse of advance in motive which has found frequent and notable expression in paintings of Latin countries which were exhibited in the notable west pavilion.

In all that belongs to the painting of the human figure and to personification through the human figure, France, and Italy after France, are still first, as they are likely to remain. They are first in the abuse as they are in the highest use of what may be, and often is, one of the high uses of painting.

The advance of painting be-

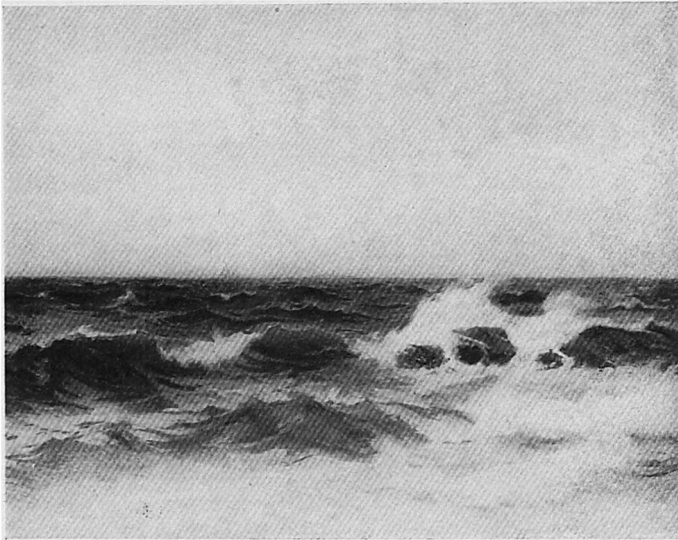


THE BOAT-BUILDER'S SHOP
 By Edward H. Potthast]

yond this, to escape wholly from limitations which belong to sculpture, is through religious, patriotic, and historical paintings, to the study of human life for its own sake, and finally to the intellectual grasp of all nature as in itself living, vital, full of a spirit which has only to be caught and expressed to need no translation into symbol, no personification of any kind to show that the life in it is real, enduring, and superhuman.

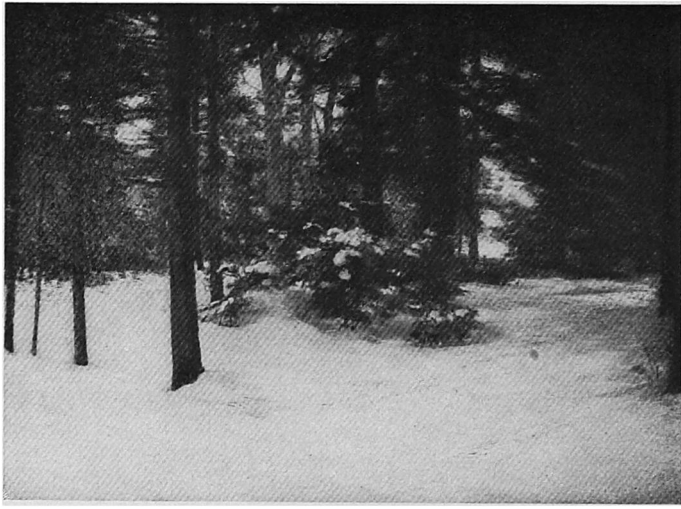
In a painting exhibited with the unsuggestive title, "The Old Willows," by Wystman of Brussels, the simplicity of treatment is as marked as the simplicity of title. The first and most natural assumption of those who saw the painting in the Belgian gallery was that the artist had been attracted by the pollarded willows at the edge of a pool. These appear in hundreds of European landscapes, and they always suggest a doubt to those who love natural beauty if any tree which has been thus maimed can be restored to its natural beauty by any art, however high. But when the spectator has moved further from the picture the willows in it cease to be conspicuous in it as if he actually moved from them in the fields. Behind them appears a landscape whose rare beauty is only suggested by the use of the word "marvelous." To do it justice, however, it must be said that instead of being marvelous it is vital, alive with its own proper life, the life of living and growing things in the sunlight. Its expression of light in the color scale and in shadows blending into white sunlight on living green, transcends the limitations of expres-

sion for life through any form of personifying what is most vital in its meaning. Such an expression, as far as it actually succeeds, belongs to the universal and the uncircumscribed. The presence of any form of animal life or of any suggestion of human passion, or even



THE WIND-SWEPT MAIN
By F. K. M. Rehn

of the utmost human tranquillity in it, would have added limitations to it at once. It is the highest of all attempts possible for painting, and failure in it means the crudest and most unredeemed of all failures.



NOEL
By Walter Nettleton

The same subtle power

to feel and to interpret life appeared in one of Bertrand's landscapes in the French galleries. Its theme is simple. It tells the story only of a small stream of clear water, emerging from the shadows of its own bluffs. But its rushes and its grasses, the bare spots and mosses and stain of the bluffs, the ripples and quiet places in the water, the subtle changes which the colors of living and growing things undergo as the sunlight falls upon them, are all full of life. The vitality of the picture is almost as incredible as its quietness.

The sheep market at Naples, shown by V. Caprile, is a typical picture of the highest order of the merit which belongs to pictures of its class in France and Italy. It is an Italian picture by an Italian, but the art in it is more characteristically French, for it is not only full of life, but of that life in which there is a subtle contradiction of itself, as there is in the most delicate wit. The whole life of the market is painted with the utmost care, so that it shall appear to be merely the market itself in its every-day dress, where the girl of seventeen has all her fresh beauty and the woman of sixty all her homeliness as in the every-day life of the town. The picture itself presents on the surface no suggestion whatever of the repellant, or the contradictory, for everything in it is harmonious as it is in the life of the town at its best. The dead sheep, as they are arranged in orderly rows in the foreground, are artistically attractive in form and color. The face of the padre, as he gazes on the choice lamb which is to supply his dinner, is full of benevolence and of satisfaction with the world. The picture does not satirize or protest in any sense, yet no one who saw and appreciated the harmonies of what was lately life

in the dead sheep could doubt that the artist painted from a mind into which the view of the evolutionist had fully entered. The picture is vital, full of life, as it is, but the vitality only appears at its climax in the contrast of active and satisfied human life with death



SUNDAY ON THE BEACH

By Maurice H. Sterne

Shown at St. Louis World's Fair

which gives it no concern—a contrast which is so delicately made that there is no suggestion of humor in the picture, nothing of levity.

When this feeling of contradiction is deepened, it expresses itself in revolt through what the Germans call "weltschmerz," as in Andrea Tavernier's "Gli Effimeri," or the "Destiny of Humanity," shown by Leempoels of Brussels. The Italian differs from the Belgian in being still Latin in his revolt. He does not sacrifice grace to express bitterness. He loves color and beauty of form, color perhaps too well, even when he is using them to express the idea that life is a transient dream and delusion from birth to grave. The Gothic mind when it actually and strongly revolts against life as it appears to be

loses what is most vital. So the Gothic appears in the Belgian through the Latin in a picture made up for the most part of human hands, stretched upward, towards a set face which does not regard either the crosses, the croziers, the knives, or the revolvers they hold.



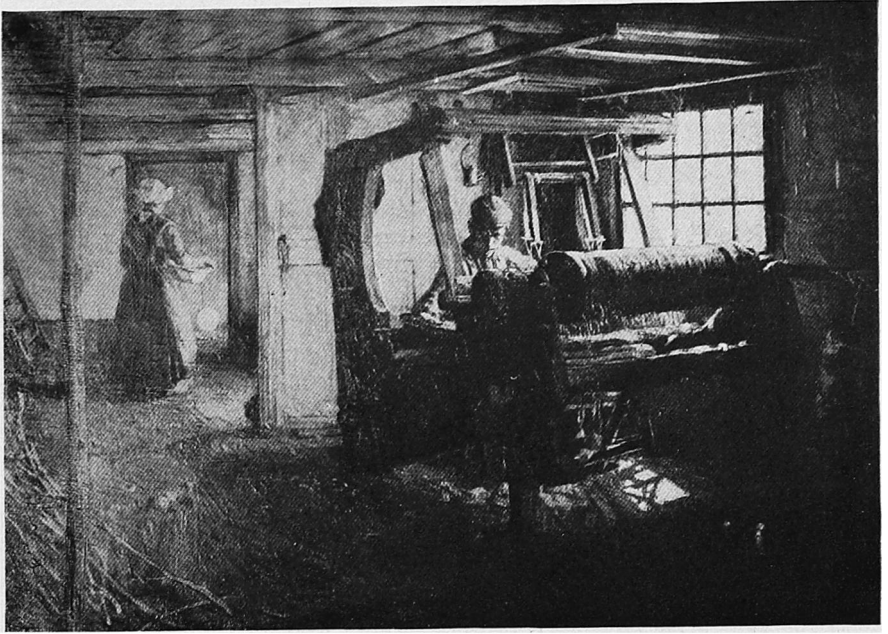
ST. MARK'S

By E. L. Vail

Shown at St. Louis World's Fair

In the "Triumph of Death," which was displayed also in the Brussels gallery, everything that is most vital in life disappears with the grace of it and the expression of the idea of death as triumphant is made at the expense of everything which makes it worth while for a painter to touch his brush or his pencil.

If such pictures belong to the life characteristic of the great modern city, they are only a minor part of it, for in a great and apparently growing class of pictures from Italy, France, Belgium, and other countries supposed to represent a dominant Latin tradition, there is governing sympathy with the life of humanity for its own sake. This appears far removed from the general life in such a paint-



THE LOOM

By Carl Buehr

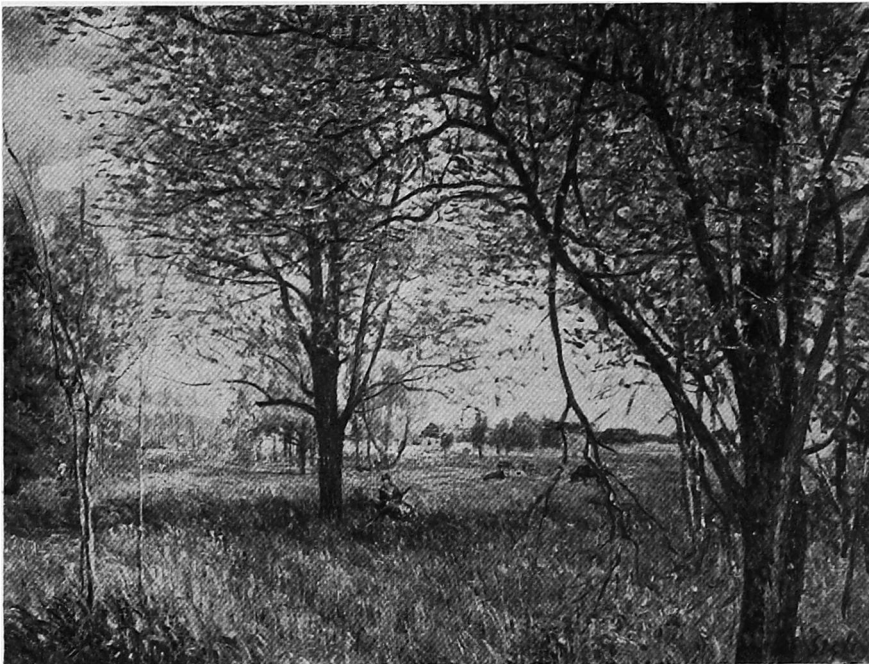
Shown at St. Louis World's Fair

ing as that in which Van der Ouderaa of Antwerp shows "the artistic temperament" in a painter who in "a moment of absence of mind" has put aside the brushes and taken up a violin. The care shown in painting whatever belongs to accessories in the picture is essentially Dutch, but the face, the thinness of the exposed wrist and fingers, the whole story of the eyes, of the mouth, of the pose, is a story of the cost of the attempt to live above the rest of the world. What it costs to live below it, Oreste Damolin paints in "Il Malnutriti" or "The Starving," a line of striking faces, in which from youth to extreme old age, the sign manual of hunger appears. Dissatisfaction takes this form in French pictures oftener than it does the form of acquiescent "Weltschmerz," which delight in the idea of death as a release.

The idea of helping things at their worst instead of protesting against them or making them appear merely commonplace or ludicrous deeply influences the pictures shown in the Latin pavilion. It appears as the motive of one of the strongest of a number of unusually strong paintings which attest the growing art of the Argentine Republic. "The Supper of the Poor," by R. Giudici. It may be added here, that while the exhibits of Latin America, including the Argentine Republic, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba, still showed the

results of restriction, they also showed the development of growing talent, which, at least in the picture of "The Thief," painted by Fabres of Mexico, is as fully an expression of genius as the subject would allow. The subject shows a young and vigorously beautiful girl, full of intense animal life, undergoing the Moorish punishment for theft. She stands against a wall, with her hands shackled to the iron ring about her neck. All the force of life in her is focused in the protest of eyes and parted lips. Hers is the only figure in the picture, but the protest is on that account the more far-reaching.

In all that belongs to human life where it is most crowded upon itself, the Latin genius is expressing itself more sympathetically at the beginning of the twentieth century than it has done before. This sympathy may take the form merely of attentive study of the various phases of common life, through which in some circumscribed development shown in a painting unexpected universal relations are revealed. In French art, and measurably in the art of Italy, this is growing at the expense of the mythological, if not of the historical. There are still dragoon charges and battle scenes in abundance. In the way of the mythological the French handling of the Teutonic myth of Siegfried and the sword Balmung has as much of the life of



LANDSCAPE

By Alfred Sisley

Shown at St. Louis World's Fair

the myth in it no doubt as is ever likely to be put on canvas. In painting a Cupid and a Psyche, Paris is still doing all that could be expected, even of Paris, in the Hogarth curves of the Psyche and of the Cupid. The high artistic skill with which such paintings are worked out is itself the motive for and the explanation of their production.

Perhaps the most marked development of interest in human life on the part of the painter shows itself in portraits whose aim is to express character, to suggest the realities of life itself rather than to please or flatter the sitter. The portraits of France were much less pleasing as a rule than those of England, but as a rule they had more life in them and the life seemed to be a part of the growing life of portrait-painting as one of the highest and finest arts.

Is there life in it? Is it the truth of life because it connects what seems to be a disconnected part with the whole of life? Does it express a meaning that was worth expressing for its own sake, regardless of art, or of literature, or of history, or myths, or of any mere form of expressing meaning? And does it express it so as to force it to be understood?

These questions must be asked of every result when the human mind attempts to express itself in any way whatever. In their own way, expressing themselves by their own methods, and with the genius peculiar to them, the "Latin peoples," as they were represented in the west pavilion, are as well prepared now to stand the test of such questions as any other people in the world—perhaps better prepared on the whole than they have been before.

HAYWOOD LAUDENDALE.



WIND-SWEPT SNOW
By Walter Nettleton
Shown at St. Louis World's Fair